

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

HARTRIGHT'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

XII.

THE exposed situation of the churchyard had obliged me to be cautious in choosing the position that I was to occupy.

The main entrance to the church was on the side next to the burial-ground; and the door was screened by a porch walled in on either side. After some little hesitation, caused by a natural reluctance to conceal myself, indispensable as that concealment was to the object in view, I had resolved on entering the porch. A loophole window was pierced in each of its side walls. Through one of these windows I could see Mrs. Fairlie's grave. The other looked towards the stone quarry in which the sexton's cottage was built. Before me, fronting the porch entrance, was a patch of bare burial-ground, a line of low stone wall, and a strip of lonely brown hill, with the sunset clouds sailing heavily over it before the strong, steady wind. No living creature was visible or audible—no bird flew by me; no dog barked from the sexton's cottage. The pauses in the dull beating of the surf, were filled up by the dreary rustling of the dwarf trees near the grave, and the cold, faint bubble of the brook over its stony bed. A dreary scene and a dreary hour. My spirits sank fast as I counted out the minutes of the evening in my hiding-place under the church porch.

It was not twilight yet—the light of the setting sun still lingered in the heavens, and little more than the first half-hour of my solitary watch had elapsed—when I heard footsteps, and a voice. The footsteps were approaching from the other side of the church; and the voice was a woman's.

"Don't you fret, my dear, about the letter," said the voice. "I gave it to the lad quite safe, and the lad he took it from me without a word. He went his way and I went mine; and not a living soul followed me, afterwards—that I'll warrant."

These words strung up my attention to a pitch of expectation that was almost painful. There was a pause of silence, but the footsteps still advanced. In another moment, two persons, both women, passed within my range of view from the porch window. They were walking straight towards the grave; and therefore they had their backs turned towards me.

One of the women was dressed in a bonnet and shawl. The other wore a long travelling-cloak of a dark blue colour, with the hood drawn over her head. A few inches of her gown were visible below the cloak. My heart beat fast as I noted the colour—it was white.

After advancing about half-way between the church and the grave, they stopped; and the woman in the cloak turned her head towards her companion. But her side face, which a bonnet might now have allowed me to see, was hidden by the heavy, projecting edge of the hood.

"Mind you keep that comfortable warm cloak on," said the same voice which I had already heard—the voice of the woman in the shawl. "Mrs. Todd is right about your looking too particular, yesterday, all in white. I'll walk about a little, while you're here; churchyards being not at all in my way, whatever they may be in yours. Finish what you want to do, before I come back; and let us be sure and get home again before night."

With those words, she turned about, and, retracing her steps, advanced with her face towards me. It was the face of an elderly woman, brown, rugged, and healthy, with nothing dishonest or suspicious in the look of it. Close to the church, she stopped to pull her shawl closer round her.

"Queer," she said to herself, "always queer, with her whims and her ways, ever since I can remember her. Harmless, though—as harmless, poor soul, as a little child."

She sighed; looked about the burial-ground nervously; shook her head as if the dreary prospect by no means pleased her; and disappeared round the corner of the church.

I doubted for a moment whether I ought to follow and speak to her, or not. My intense anxiety to find myself face to face with her companion helped me to decide in the negative. I could ensure seeing the woman in the shawl by waiting near the churchyard until she came back—although it seemed more than doubtful whether she could give me the information of which I was in search. The person who had delivered the letter was of little consequence. The person who had written it was the one centre of interest, and the one source of information; and that person I now felt convinced was before me in the churchyard.

While these ideas were passing through my

mind, I saw the woman in the cloak approach close to the grave, and stand looking at it for a little while. She then glanced all round her, and, taking a white linen cloth or handkerchief from under her cloak, turned aside towards the brook. The little stream ran into the churchyard under a tiny archway in the bottom of the wall, and ran out again, after a winding course of a few dozen yards, under a similar opening. She dipped the cloth in the water, and returned to the grave. I saw her kiss the white cross; then kneel down before the inscription, and apply her wet cloth to the cleansing of it.

After considering how I could show myself with the least possible chance of frightening her, I resolved to cross the wall before me, to skirt round it outside, and to enter the churchyard again by the stile near the grave, in order that she might see me as I approached. She was so absorbed over her employment that she did not hear me coming until I had stepped over the stile. Then, she looked up, started to her feet with a faint cry, and stood facing me in speechless and motionless terror.

"Don't be frightened," I said. "Surely, you remember me?"

I stopped while I spoke—then advanced a few steps gently—then stopped again—and so approached by little and little, till I was close to her. If there had been any doubt still left in my mind, it must have been now set at rest. There, speaking affrightedly for itself—there was the same face confronting me over Mrs. Fairlie's grave, which had first looked into mine on the high road by night.

"You remember me?" I said. "We met very late, and I helped you to find the way to London. Surely you have not forgotten that?"

Her features relaxed, and she drew a heavy breath of relief. I saw the new life of recognition stirring slowly under the deathlike stillness which fear had set on her face.

"Don't attempt to speak to me, just yet," I went on. "Take time to recover yourself—take time to feel quite certain that I am a friend."

"You are very kind to me," she murmured. "As kind now, as you were then."

She stopped, and I kept silence on my side. I was not granting time for composure to her only, I was gaining time also for myself. Under the wan, wild evening light, that woman and I were met together again; a grave between us, the dead about us, the lonesome hills closing us round on every side. The time, the place, the circumstances under which we now stood face to face in the evening stillness of that dreary valley; the life-long interests which might hang suspended on the next chance words that passed between us; the sense that, for aught I knew to the contrary, the whole future of Laura Fairlie's life might be determined, for good or for evil, by my winning or losing the confidence of the forlorn creature who stood trembling by her mother's grave—all threatened to shake the steadiness and the self-control on which every inch of the progress I might yet make now depended. I tried hard, as I felt

this, to possess myself of all my resources; I did my utmost to turn the few moments for reflection to the best account.

"Are you calmer, now?" I said, as soon as I thought it time to speak again. "Can you talk to me, without feeling frightened, and without forgetting that I am a friend?"

"How did you come here?" she asked, without noticing what I had just said to her.

"Don't you remember my telling you, when we last met, that I was going to Cumberland? I have been in Cumberland ever since; I have been staying all the time at Limmeridge House."

"At Limmeridge House!" Her pale face brightened as she repeated the words; her wandering eyes fixed on me with a sudden interest. "Ah, how happy you must have been!" she said, looking at me eagerly, without a shadow of its former distrust left in her expression.

I took advantage of her newly-aroused confidence in me, to observe her face, with an attention and a curiosity which I had hitherto restrained myself from showing, for caution's sake. I looked at her, with my mind full of that other lovely face which had so ominously recalled her to my memory on the terrace by moonlight. I had seen Anne Catherick's likeness in Miss Fairlie. I now saw Miss Fairlie's likeness in Anne Catherick—saw it all the more clearly because the points of dissimilarity between the two were presented to me as well as the points of resemblance. In the general outline of the countenance and general proportion of the features; in the colour of the hair and in the little nervous uncertainty about the lips; in the height and size of the figure, and the carriage of the head and body, the likeness appeared even more startling than I had ever felt it to be yet. But there the resemblance ended, and the dissimilarity, in details, began. The delicate beauty of Miss Fairlie's complexion, the transparent clearness of her eyes, the smooth purity of her skin, the tender bloom of colour on her lips, were all missing from the worn, weary face that was now turned towards mine. Although I hated myself even for thinking such a thing, still, while I looked at the woman before me, the idea would force itself into my mind that one sad change, in the future, was all that was wanting to make the likeness complete, which I now saw to be so imperfect in detail. If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and then only, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflexions of one another.

I shuddered at the thought. There was something horrible in the blind, unreasoning distrust of the future which the mere passage of it through my mind seemed to imply. It was a welcome interruption to be roused by feeling Anne Catherick's hand laid on my shoulder. The touch was as stealthy and as sudden as that other touch, which had petrified me from head to foot on the night when we first met.

"You are looking at me; and you are thinking of something," she said, with her strange, breathless rapidity of utterance. "What is it?"

"Nothing extraordinary," I answered. "I was only wondering how you came here."

"I came with a friend who is very good to me. I have only been here two days."

"And you found your way to this place, yesterday?"

"How do you know that?"

"I only guessed it."

She turned from me, and knelt down before the inscription once more.

"Where should I go, if not here?" she said.

"The friend who was better than a mother to me, is the only friend I have to visit at Limeridge. Oh, it makes my heart ache to see a stain on her tomb! It ought to be kept white as snow, for her sake. I was tempted to begin cleaning it yesterday; and I can't help coming back to go on with it to-day. Is there anything wrong in that? I hope not. Surely nothing can be wrong that I do for Mrs. Fairlie's sake?"

The old grateful sense of her benefactress's kindness was evidently the ruling idea still in the poor creature's mind—the narrow mind which had but too plainly opened to no other lasting impression since that first impression of her younger and happier days. I saw that my best chance of winning her confidence lay in encouraging her to proceed with the artless employment which she had come into the burial-ground to pursue. She resumed it at once, on my telling her she might do so; touching the hard marble as tenderly as if it had been a sentient thing, and whispering the words of the inscription to herself, over and over again, as if the lost days of her girlhood had returned and she was patiently learning her lesson once more at Mrs. Fairlie's knees.

"Should you wonder very much," I said, preparing the way as cautiously as I could for the questions that were to come, "if I owned that it is a satisfaction to me, as well as a surprise, to see you here? I felt very uneasy about you after you left me in the cab."

She looked up quickly and suspiciously.

"Uneasy," she repeated. "Why?"

"A strange thing happened, after we parted, that night. Two men overtook me in a chaise. They did not see where I was standing; but they stopped near me, and spoke to a policeman, on the other side of the way."

She instantly suspended her employment. The hand holding the damp cloth with which she had been cleaning the inscription, dropped to her side. The other hand grasped the marble cross at the head of the grave. Her face turned towards me slowly, with the blank look of terror set rigidly on it once more. I went on at all hazards; it was too late now to draw back.

"The two men spoke to the policeman," I said, "and asked him if he had seen you. He had not seen you; and then one of the men spoke again, and said you had escaped from his Asylum."

She sprang to her feet, as if my last words had set the pursuers on her track.

"Stop! and hear the end," I cried. "Stop! and you shall know how I befriended you. A word from me would have told the men which way you had gone—and I never spoke that word. I helped your escape—I made it safe and certain. Think, try to think. Try to understand what I tell you."

My manner seemed to influence her more than my words. She made an effort to grasp the new idea. Her hands shifted the damp cloth hesitatingly from one to the other, exactly as they had shifted the little travelling bag on the night when I first saw her. Slowly, the purpose of my words seemed to force its way through the confusion and agitation of her mind. Slowly, her features relaxed, and her eyes looked at me with their expression gaining in curiosity what it was fast losing in fear.

"You don't think I ought to be back in the Asylum, do you?" she said.

"Certainly not. I am glad you escaped from it; I am glad I helped you."

"Yes, yes; you did help me, indeed; you helped me at the hard part," she went on, a little vacantly. "It was easy to escape, or I should not have got away. They never suspected me as they suspected the others. I was so quiet, and so obedient, and so easily frightened. The finding London was the hard part; and there you helped me. Did I thank you at the time? I thank you now, very kindly."

"Was the Asylum far from where you met me? Come! show that you believe me to be your friend, and tell me where it was."

She mentioned the place—a private Asylum, as its situation informed me; a private Asylum not very far from the spot where I had seen her—and then, with evident suspicion of the use to which I might put her answer, anxiously repeated her former inquiry: "You don't think I ought to be taken back, do you?"

"Once again, I am glad you escaped; I am glad you prospered well, after you left me," I answered. "You said you had a friend in London to go to. Did you find the friend?"

"Yes. It was very late; but there was a girl up at needlework in the house, and she helped me to rouse Mrs. Clements. Mrs. Clements is my friend. A good, kind woman, but not like Mrs. Fairlie. Ah, no, nobody is like Mrs. Fairlie!"

"Is Mrs. Clements an old friend of yours? Have you known her a long time?"

"Yes; she was a neighbour of ours once, at home, in Hampshire; and liked me, and took care of me when I was a little girl. Years ago, when she went away from us, she wrote down in my prayer-book for me, where she was going to live in London, and she said, 'If you are ever in trouble, Anne, come to me. I have no husband alive to say me nay, and no children to look after; and I will take care of you.' Kind words, were they not? I suppose I remember them because they were kind. It's little enough I remember besides—little enough, little enough!"

"Had you no father or mother to take care of you?"

"Father? I never saw him; I never heard mother speak of him. Father? Ah, dear! he is dead, I suppose."

"And your mother?"

"I don't get on well with her. We are a trouble and a fear to each other."

A trouble and a fear to each other! At those words, the suspicion crossed my mind for the first time, that her mother might be the person who had placed her under restraint.

"Don't ask me about mother," she went on. "I'd rather talk of Mrs. Clements. Mrs. Clements is like you, she doesn't think that I ought to be back in the Asylum; and she is as glad as you are that I escaped from it. She cried over my misfortune, and said it must be kept secret from everybody."

Her "misfortune." In what sense was she using that word? In a sense which might explain her motive in writing the anonymous letter? In a sense which might show it to be the too common and too customary motive that has led many a woman to interpose anonymous hindrances to the marriage of the man who has ruined her? I resolved to attempt the clearing up of this doubt, before more words passed between us on either side.

"What misfortune?" I asked.

"The misfortune of my being shut up," she answered, with every appearance of feeling surprised at my question. "What other misfortune could there be?"

I determined to persist, as delicately and forbearingly as possible. It was of very great importance that I should be absolutely sure of every step in the investigation that I now gained in advance.

"There is another misfortune," I said, "to which a woman may be liable, and by which she may suffer life-long sorrow and shame."

"What is it?" she asked, eagerly.

"The misfortune of believing too innocently in her own virtue, and in the faith and honour of the man she loves," I answered.

She looked up at me, with the artless bewilderment of a child. Not the slightest confusion or change of colour; not the faintest trace of any secret consciousness of shame struggling to the surface, appeared in her face—that face which betrayed every other emotion with such transparent clearness. No words that ever were spoken could have assured me, as her look and manner now assured me, that the motive which I had assigned for her writing the letter and sending it to Miss Fairlie was plainly and distinctly the wrong one. That doubt, at any rate, was now set at rest; but the very removal of it opened a new prospect of uncertainty. The letter, as I knew from positive testimony, pointed at Sir Percival Glyde, though it did not name him. She must have had some strong motive, originating in some deep sense of injury, for secretly denouncing him to Miss Fairlie, in such terms as she had employed—and that motive was unquestionably

not to be traced to the loss of her innocence and her character. Whatever wrong he might have inflicted on her was not of that nature. Of what nature could it be?

"I don't understand you," she said, after evidently trying hard, and trying in vain to discover the meaning of the words I had last said to her.

"Never mind," I answered. "Let us go on with what we were talking about. Tell me how long you stayed with Mrs. Clements in London, and how you came here."

"How long?" she repeated. "I stayed with Mrs. Clements till we both came to this place, two days ago."

"You are living in the village, then?" I said. "It is strange I should not have heard of you, though you have only been there two days."

"No, no; not in the village. Three miles away at a farm. Do you know the farm? They call it Todd's Corner."

I remembered the place perfectly; we had often passed by it in our drives. It was one of the oldest farms in the neighbourhood, situated in a solitary, sheltered spot, inland, at the junction of two hills.

"They are relations of Mrs. Clements at Todd's Corner," she went on, "and they had often asked her to go and see them. She said she would go, and take me with her, for the quiet and the fresh air. It was very kind, was it not? I would have gone anywhere to be quiet, and safe, and out of the way. But when I heard that Todd's Corner was near Limmeridge—oh! I was so happy I would have walked all the way barefoot to get there, and see the schools and the village and Limmeridge House again. They are very good people at Todd's Corner. I hope I shall stay there a long time. There is only one thing I don't like about them, and don't like about Mrs. Clements—"

"What is it?"

"They will tease me about dressing all in white—they say it looks so particular. How do they know? Mrs. Fairlie knew best. Mrs. Fairlie would never have made me wear this ugly blue cloak. Ah! she was fond of white in her lifetime; and here is white stone about her grave—and I am making it whiter for her sake. She often wore white herself; and she always dressed her little daughter in white. Is Miss Fairlie well and happy? Does she wear white now, as she used when she was a girl?"

Her voice sank when she put the questions about Miss Fairlie; and she turned her head farther and farther away from me. I thought I detected, in the alteration in her manner, an uneasy consciousness of the risk she had run in sending the anonymous letter; and I instantly determined so to frame my answer as to surprise her into owning it.

"Miss Fairlie is not very well or very happy this morning," I said.

She murmured a few words; but they were spoken so confusedly, and in such a low tone, that I could not even guess at what they meant.

"Did you ask me why Miss Fairlie was

neither well nor happy this morning?" I continued.

"No," she said, quickly and eagerly—"oh, no, I never asked that."

"I will tell you without your asking," I went on. "Miss Fairlie has received your letter."

She had been down on her knees for some little time past, carefully removing the last weather-stains left about the inscription, while we were speaking together. The first sentence of the words I had just addressed to her made her pause in her occupation, and turn slowly, without rising from her knees, so as to face me. The second sentence literally petrified her. The cloth she had been holding dropped from her hands; her lips fell apart; all the little colour that there was naturally in her face left it in an instant.

"How do you know?" she said, faintly. "Who showed it to you?" The blood rushed back into her face—rushed overwhelmingly, as the sense rushed upon her mind that her own words had betrayed her. She struck her hands together in despair. "I never wrote it," she gasped, affrightedly; "I know nothing about it!"

"Yes," I said, "you wrote it, and you know about it. It was wrong to send such a letter; it was wrong to frighten Miss Fairlie. If you had anything to say that it was right and necessary for her to hear, you should have gone yourself to Limmeridge House; you should have spoken to the young lady with your own lips."

She crouched down over the flat stone of the grave, till her face was hidden on it; and made no reply.

"Miss Fairlie will be as good and kind to you as her mother was, if you mean well," I went on. "Miss Fairlie will keep your secret, and not let you come to any harm. Will you see her to-morrow at the farm? Will you meet her in the garden at Limmeridge House?"

"Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with you!" Her lips murmured the words close on the grave-stone; murmured them in tones of passionate endearment, to the dead remains beneath. "You know how I love your child, for your sake! Oh, Mrs. Fairlie! Mrs. Fairlie! tell me how to save her. Be my darling and my mother once more, and tell me what to do for the best!"

I heard her lips kissing the stone: I saw her hands beating on it passionately. The sound and the sight deeply affected me. I stooped down, and took the poor helpless hands tenderly in mine, and tried to soothe her.

It was useless. She snatched her hands from me, and never moved her face from the stone. Seeing the urgent necessity of quieting her at any hazard and by any means, I appealed to the only anxiety that she had appeared to feel, in connexion with me and with my opinion of her—the anxiety to convince me of her fitness to be mistress of her own actions.

"Come, come," I said, gently. "Try to compose yourself, or you will make me alter my opinion of you. Don't let me think that the

person who put you in the Asylum, might have had some excuse——"

The next words died away on my lips. The instant I risked that chance reference to the person who had put her in the Asylum, she sprang up on her knees. A most extraordinary and startling change passed over her. Her face, at all ordinary times so touching to look at, in its nervous sensitiveness, weakness, and uncertainty, became suddenly darkened by an expression of maniacally intense hatred and fear, which communicated a wild, unnatural force to every feature. Her eyes dilated in the dim evening light, like the eyes of a wild animal. She caught up the cloth that had fallen at her side, as if it had been a living creature that she could kill, and crushed it in both her hands with such convulsive strength that the few drops of moisture left in it trickled down on the stone beneath her.

"Talk of something else," she said, whispering through her teeth. "I shall lose myself if you talk of that."

Every vestige of the gentler thoughts which had filled her mind hardly a minute since, seemed to be swept from it now. It was evident that the impression left by Mrs. Fairlie's kindness was not, as I had supposed, the only strong impression on her memory. With the grateful remembrance of her school-days at Limmeridge, there existed the vindictive remembrance of the wrong inflicted on her by her confinement in the Asylum. Who had done that wrong? Could it really be her mother?

It was hard to give up pursuing the inquiry to that final point; but I forced myself to abandon all idea of continuing it. Seeing her as I saw her now, it would have been cruel to think of anything but the necessity and the humanity of restoring her composure.

"I will talk of nothing to distress you," I said soothingly.

"You want something," she answered, sharply and suspiciously. "Don't look at me, like that. Speak to me; tell me what you want."

"I only want you to quiet yourself, and, when you are calmer, to think over what I have said."

"Said?" She paused; twisted the cloth in her hands, backwards and forwards; and whispered to herself, "What is it he said?" She turned again towards me, and shook her head impatiently. "Why don't you help me?" she asked, with angry suddenness.

"Yes, yes," I said; "I will help you; and you will soon remember. I asked you to see Miss Fairlie to-morrow, and to tell her the truth about the letter."

"Ah! Miss Fairlie—Fairlie—Fairlie——"

The mere utterance of the loved, familiar name seemed to quiet her. Her face softened and grew like itself again.

"You need have no fear of Miss Fairlie," I continued; "and no fear of getting into trouble through the letter. She knows so much about it already, that you will have no difficulty in telling her all. There can be little necessity for concealment where there is hardly anything

left to conceal. You mention no names in the letter; but Miss Fairlie knows that the person you write of is Sir Percival Glyde—"

The instant I pronounced that name, she started to her feet; and a scream burst from her that rang through the churchyard and made my heart leap in me with the terror of it. The dark deformity of the expression which had just left her face, lowered on it once more, with doubled and trebled intensity. The shriek at the name, the reiterated look of hatred and fear that instantly followed, told all. Not even a last doubt now remained. Her mother was guiltless of imprisoning her in the Asylum. A man had shut her up—and that man was Sir Percival Glyde.

The scream had reached other ears than mine. On one side, I heard the door of the sexton's cottage open; on the other, I heard the voice of her companion, the woman in the shawl, the woman whom she had spoken of as Mrs. Clements.

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" cried the voice, from behind the clump of dwarf trees.

In a moment more, Mrs. Clements hurried into view.

"Who are you?" she cried, facing me resolutely, as she set her foot on the stile. "How dare you frighten a poor helpless woman like that?"

She was at Anne Catherick's side, and had put one arm around her, before I could answer. "What is it, my dear?" she said. "What has he done to you?"

"Nothing," the poor creature answered. "Nothing. I'm only frightened."

Mrs. Clements turned on me with a fearless indignation, for which I respected her.

"I should be heartily ashamed of myself if I deserved that angry look," I said. "But I do not deserve it. I have unfortunately startled her, without intending it. This is not the first time she has seen me. Ask her yourself, and she will tell you that I am incapable of willingly harming her or any woman."

I spoke distinctly, so that Anne Catherick might hear and understand me: and I saw that the words and their meaning had reached her.

"Yes, yes," she said; "he was good to me once; he helped me—" She whispered the rest into her friend's ear.

"Strange, indeed!" said Mrs. Clements, with a look of perplexity. "It makes all the difference, though. I'm sorry I spoke so rough to you, sir; but you must own that appearances looked suspicious to a stranger. It's more my fault than yours, for humouring her whims, and letting her be alone in such a place as this. Come, my dear—come home, now."

I thought the good woman looked a little uneasy at the prospect of the walk back, and I offered to go with them until they were both within sight of home. Mrs. Clements thanked me civilly, and declined. She said they were sure to meet some of the farm-labourers, as soon as they got to the moor.

"Try to forgive me," I said, when Anne

Catherick took her friend's arm to go away. Innocent as I had been of any intention to terrify and agitate her, my heart smote me as I looked at the poor, pale, frightened face.

"I will try," she answered. "But you know too much; I'm afraid you will always frighten me now."

Mrs. Clements glanced at me, and shook her head pityingly.

"Good night, sir," she said. "You couldn't help it, I know; but I wish it was me you had frightened, and not her."

They moved away a few steps. I thought they had left me; but Anne suddenly stopped, and separated herself from her friend.

"Wait a little," she said. "I must say good-by."

She returned to the grave, rested both hands tenderly on the marble cross, and kissed it.

"I'm better, now," she sighed, looking up at me quietly. "I forgive you."

She joined her companion again, and they left the burial-ground. I saw them stop near the church, and speak to the sexton's wife, who had come from the cottage, and had waited, watching us from a distance. Then they went on again up the path that led to the moor. I looked after Anne Catherick as she disappeared, till all trace of her had faded in the twilight—looked, as anxiously and sorrowfully, as if that was the last I was to see in this weary world of the woman in white.

FAIR AND FOUL CIRCASSIANS.

Two months ago, Constantinople was filled with exiled Circassians; a brave nation had succumbed to the power of Russia; another race had been absorbed by the great creeping glacier that turns all it meets, to death. Ten thousand dagger-wearing, woolly-capped Tchirgees, as the Turks call them, were swarming in the bazaars, coffee-shops, kibab stalls, and khans. They were to be seen, rude and sullen, chafed and spirit-broken, at every fountain, and under every mosque wall. The Sultan had received them as guests, and had lavishly given each man about fourpence a week for his support: an ample, yet not a fattening largesse. He had also cleared out a huge khan or barrack, a vast building that would hold thousands of people, for their use. Some restraint was laid, I think, upon their silver-ringed matchlocks, for the sake of the safety of true Mussulmans: for, the Tchirgee is a good marksman, and is of a choleric and rather tigery nature. Besides, a man just escaped, bleeding and rib-broken, from the gripe of a bear, is not in the best of humour. Therefore, when I relate that these mountaineers sometimes used their broad daggers a little hastily—about so small a thing as even a smoky kibab, or a damaged melon—you will not allow your opinion to be lowered of a brave, devoted, and unfortunate people.

Constantinople—never a convenient or luxurious place for the promenader, with its nar-